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C O N F I D E N T I A L BAGHDAD 001953

SIPDIS

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [KIRF](#) [PREL](#) [IZ](#)

SUBJECT: PRIME MINISTER MOVES TO ADDRESS CHRISTIAN NEEDS

REF: BAGHDAD 1848

Classified By: Political Counselor Matt Tueller for reasons 1.4 (b, d).

¶1. (C) George Bakoos, an Iraqi-Christian political advisor to Prime Minister (PM) Maliki, reported to Emboff June 25 that he has been tapped by the PM to serve on a new GOI committee tasked with "determining and following-up on all the needs of the Christian community in Iraq." The committee is headed by Minister of Industry Fawzi al-Hariri (a Christian) and includes two other members: Naseer al-Ani, President Talabani's Chief of Staff, and Wijdan Mikhail, Minister of Human Rights (also a Christian). Bakoos said the committee's first step will be to meet with the heads of all the major Christian sects in Iraq and to identify their security, education and social needs -- including whether they need any GOI assistance in maintaining their church buildings and properties. As several of the church leaders will be out of the country until the end of June, that meeting has been tentatively scheduled for sometime around July 9.

¶2. (C) Comment: PM Maliki's decision to establish this committee is a reflection of the importance that he attaches to religious freedom as well as his increased awareness of the threats to the welfare of Iraq's Christian community. Despite what his detractors might claim, Maliki clearly understands that religious freedom and tolerance is integral to national reconciliation. Post will track the committee's progress and will continue to raise the status of Iraq's religious minorities in future meetings with the Prime Minister's office and with other relevant GOI officials.
CROCKER